United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/26

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 December 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-19642 (E) 051218

Please recycle

Statement

Social Protection Systems, Public Services And Sustainable Infrastructure For Gender Equality

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University unreservedly endorses the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015. It is acknowledged that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development affirms the crucial importance of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls as both a prioritised goal as well as a key ingredient of success across the Agenda in its entirety.

Report of the United Nations General Assembly on Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children calls for the development, enforcement and strengthening of effective measures to combat and eliminate all forms of trafficking in women and girls. The Assembly called upon Governments to, amongst other aims, also address the factors that increase the vulnerability of women and girls to being trafficked and strengthen prevention and awareness-raising action. This is also deemed to be relevant for other forms of violation against women, example rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment and female genital mutilation.

It is necessary to highlight that the report of the United Nations General Assembly on Intensification of Efforts to Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls postulates that all forms of sexual violence against women and girls, including rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment, are rooted in male domination, entitlement, power and control. They all involve actions which deny a person's dignity. Regardless of the context in which these violations occur, be it within the home, community or workplace, they are directly or indirectly used to maintain and reinforce patriarchal norms, roles and structures and an unequal power relationship between women and men.

Social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure are deemed to be integral elements of the 2030 Agenda and critical for achieving gender equality and sustainable development across all 17 Goals. These three aspects are highly complementary, and it would be most optimal if they worked in parallel in addressing the multiple dimensions of gender inequality and consequent poverty that many women and girls are facing.

Whilst social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure have the valid potential to narrow the gap of gender inequality and consequent poverty for women and girls across the globe, it is acknowledged that the world is still at a considerable distance away from the realisation of these facilities on a global scale.

In giving consideration to the inner dynamics of how gender inequality transpired, it can be seen that an individual's identity insidiously became limited by the external factors associated with the physical body, and gender being one of the most influencing factors that profile the limitation in identity. From birth, a child is given a name and adopts a gender. Both are reinforced regularly by family and society and these can be seen as the early trappings of body-consciousness. Thus, a child finds identity in its name and form. An identity that is already external to the true inner self. This limited external identity, largely based on gender is one that begins to separate and discriminate. Children are confronted by apparent differences relatively early in life and this is where the attitudes and identity of the family unit, parents and culture play a significant part in moulding personal identity.

As the identity becomes progressively externalized, its well-being requires conducive circumstances and relationships to perpetuate this identity. As a result, negative attributes often emerge. Arrogance is born that one can maintain control over an external world of circumstances and relationships, Greed emerges, for fulfilment through wealth, status or food. Attachment offers an illusion of comfort, through possessiveness over people or objects. Lust develops for self-gratification or to satisfy strong and excessive desires. And so it can be understood how the inner dynamics of how gender inequality and consequent violation against women and girls occurs/ed.

All measures to combat and eliminate all forms of violation against women and girls ultimately target each women and girl child, soul by soul. If we wish to address the factors that affect the vulnerability of women and girls and strengthen prevention and awareness-raising action, then the question arises as to what will promote the efficacy of any project or programme.

In dissecting the existing strategies and initiatives to attain sustainable gender equality, a review revealed that while on a governmental and societal level, attempts are being made to narrow the gap of gender inequality and consequent poverty for women and girls through external and practical initiatives, there appears to be a paucity and still remains an opportunity for organisations to make a difference on an individual and small group level. The aim would be to deliver a cutting-edge programme that strikes deep into the essential core solution to the aforementioned challenges that women and girls by addressing the root of the problem.

There are innumerable empowerment/ development programmes that already exist in, which are largely based on practical skills development or life skills development however interventions to address the aforementioned root causative factor requires a spiritual and values based injection. The Brahma Kumaris choose to focus on the personal, intrinsic factors that promote sustainable development in women and girls which is pride in gender identity, internal locus of control, sense of autonomy, emotional intelligence and ability to self-regulate.

It is time that spirituality and values is given its rightful place as a formidable mechanism to drive personal change and a necessary first step in preparing women to relentlessly advocate for and access all other social protection systems, public services and infrastructures for gender equality. This is how women can be empowered to 'do it for themselves'. If we truly want to achieve full participation by and access for women, then exploration about skill building, finance and project implementation cannot be the only conversations we have. Henceforth, it would be more effective and sustainable to include personal empowerment through spirituality and values. This is the missing link. This will naturally foster self-respect and the courage to claim a share of power.

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University unequivocally supports gender equality and is especially committed to the realization of the potential of girls and women. We understand that it is the right of girls and women to be educated and to explore, experience and express their potential to the fullest extent. To illustrate the practical manifestation of the value given to women, it is acknowledged that the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University is the world's largest spiritual organization led by women.

The same supportive stance can be applied to men and, who are often deemed to be the 'perpetrators' as well as to leaders who are criticised for not fulfilling the duties entrusted to them by continuing to perpetuate legislation and systems which reinforce gender bias and consequent violation/poverty of women and girls. Men and leaders who come under scrutiny are also individuals whose identities were moulded according to the external factors that traversed most families and cultures from time immemorial. In order to effect permanent change, these individuals need to be

supported to experience themselves and women to be equal in identity and therefore value and capacity. Once again, personal empowerment through spirituality and values is the missing link. This will naturally foster respect and a willingness to share power.

Personal development for social changes: requires the understanding of how the human mind works. Until the human mind is aligned with the intrinsic identity, which is soul based, human choices and consequent behaviour will still be influenced by externa circumstances and relationships. By aligning the mind to a new level of inner identity, we can develop personal capacity by harnessing the 'power' of the mind. Reference to 'power' in this context implies a sense of strong self-determination and the capacity to think, feel and act in accordance with the highest of human principles as expounded by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Beginning from the level of mind, it may be a wise alternative to elicit desirable outcomes by promoting conduct that is alignment with our intrinsic nature example pause for peace as opposed to rejecting violence and chiding the mind into stop that violence. There could be untold value in exploring new innovative methods to achieve the behaviour we wish to reinforce, on an individual level as well as societal.

Our deep realization of these spiritual attitudes is a powerful entry point in shifting the approach to achieving gender equality. From working within the traditional constructs of victim/perpetrator and social welfare recipient/social welfare, we move into the elevated framework of creative contribution, empowered participation, and a pro-active community characterized by positive change and transformation from within the core of each of us. This realization and conscious awareness can afford each of us strength and hope, and can be a powerful tool to help overcome the indignities of all forms of violence and consequent poverty. On the basis of Government, societal, family and personal commitment to spirituality and values, the previous lost opportunities and restricted access to social protection systems, public services and sustainable infrastructure, can change and enhanced full participation by women and girls in programmes that will allow for sustainability and true change is envisaged.